Grove [*née* Clark], Jean Mary

(1927–2001)

Brian Whalley, revised

https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/75724
Published in print: 05 March 2009
Published online: 06 January 2005
This version: 11 April 2024

Grove [*née* Clark], Jean Mary (1927–2001), geographer, was born on 10 March 1927 at 175 Waldegrave Road, Teddington, Middlesex, the elder daughter of Leslie Marshall Clark and his wife, Mary, *née* Johnson. Mary Clark was a very important influence on both her daughters, Jean and Margaret (later Margaret Spufford, who also achieved eminence, as a social and economic historian). In 1917 she was the only person, male or female, to obtain a first in the Cambridge natural sciences tripos, in the parallel class-list for women. She went on to be senior student in the chemistry research laboratory at Cambridge. There she met a research student who became her husband in 1926. The latter, a research chemist at the National Physical Laboratory at the time of Jean's birth, was eventually director of research at ICI Alkali.

Jean Clark had tuberculosis as a child and for a year lived in a summer house in the garden. There she read widely, including books on exploration, geology, and astronomy, and was taught by her mother. During the Second World War the family moved to St Asaph, north Wales. Jean attended Howell's School, Denbigh, where Marjorie Sweeting, later a reader in geography at Oxford, was teaching geography. She was a major influence, and Jean decided to read geography at her mother's former college, Newnham. She much enjoyed a long vacation field trip to the Jotunheim mountains of Norway in 1947, led by W. Vaughan Lewis, Gordon Manley, and Ronald Peel. Frank Debenham and Jean Mitchell provided much encouragement, and in the next three years Jean herself led small parties of students to Norway. Subsequently she joined several university glaciological expeditions. The aim of the first of these in 1951, organized by Lewis and John McCall, an American research student, was for undergraduate labour to excavate a tunnel into Vesl-Skautbreen, a cirque glacier, to investigate its structure and flow characteristics. The headwall of the glacier was reached and graduates in geography, geology, and mineralogy thereby gained the opportunity to make observations that laid the basis for post-war British glaciological research. Jean Clark examined the banding on and in Vesl-Skautbreen and Veslgjuvbreen, and was awarded the degree of PhD in 1956 for a thesis entitled *'A study of aspects of the physiography of certain glaciers in Norway'*. She produced two chapters in *Investigations on Norwegian Cirque Glaciers* (Royal Geographical Society Research Series, number 4, 1960), edited by Lewis, which brought together this innovative work. She published three other papers on the nature of these glaciers.

From 1951 to 1953 Jean Clark lectured at Bedford College, London, under Gordon Manley. She was then appointed director of studies in geography at Girton College and became a fellow in 1960. She had met Alfred Thomas (Dick) Grove, three years older than her, when he was appointed to the geography department. He assisted with the surveying in Norway. He was the son of Edwin Grove, fruit and vegetable merchant. They married on 17 July 1954, settled in Cambridge, and had three sons and three daughters. In

Printed from Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Under the terms of the licence agreement, an individual user may print out a single article for personal use (for details see Privacy Policy and Legal Notice).

Subscriber: University of Cambridge; date: 30 January 2025

1963, with their young family, they spent six months in Ghana, teaching at Legon University. In 1966, with the assistance of Sylvia Hewlett and Anita Johansen, Jean Grove made a study of the history and technology of the indigenous irrigation systems in the Volta delta.

Jean Grove's research continued to involve glaciers but increasingly it turned towards historical climatology, then a somewhat neglected area—following in the footsteps of Gordon Manley and Hubert Lamb. It was known that glaciers in the Alps had extended well beyond their present limits, leaving behind moraines dating from roughly 1600 to 1900, the period known as the little ice age. Jean sought 'proxy' data for the instrumental climatic record in the Alps and elsewhere. She and Arthur Battagel, a relation by marriage, made use of the information provided by land tax records about climatic and glacial damage to farmland in Norway. It remained unclear whether the little ice age was globally synchronous, and so she proceeded to collect information from the field and from archives in many parts of the world. In 1988 her *magnum opus*, *The Little Ice Age*, was published. This provided the first comprehensive study of the phenomenon. Her research was extended with European Union grants for the reconstruction of Mediterranean climates in the historic period. With Annalisa Conterio she made use of the Venetian archives to investigate the climate of Crete in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and with Anne Gellatly she traced the retreat of glaciers in the Pyrenees, southern France, and central Italy in recent centuries.

Jean Grove's academic output, in terms of books and papers, was not enormous by today's standards, yet her influence was substantial. Many of her protégées at Girton became distinguished academics, and many made their mark in other professions. Her supportive attitude was much valued. In particular, Girton geographers were encouraged, even required, to do fieldwork abroad, and as a result their final-year dissertations were accomplished in many remote parts of the world. It is fitting that in her memory a Jean Grove travel scholarship was instituted for undergraduates at Girton College.

Though never an ardent feminist, Jean Grove was true to her mother's upbringing. She showed in her teaching and research, her commitment to college, and support of friends and students, that a mother of three sons and three daughters (with the valued assistance, it might be added, of au pairs) could continue to pursue a productive academic career. She was an active Roman Catholic and had a very happy domestic life. The Groves's house in Storeys Way became ecumenical in all senses, with a steady flow of visitors, researchers, and undergraduates, and a family environment with culinary diversity associated with her travels. She died at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, on 17 January 2001, following an aortic aneurysm, and was survived by her husband and their six children. A second edition of her book *The Little Ice Age*, edited by her husband, and incorporating new material written by her, was published in 2004, as *Little Ice Ages*.

Jean Grove's eldest child, Richard Hugh Grove (1955–2020), geographer and historian, was born on 21 July 1955 at Cambridge maternity hospital. He was educated at the Perse School in Cambridge and at Hertford College, Oxford, where he took a degree in geography in 1979. He followed this with an MSc in conservation biology from University College, London, in 1980, and (after a spell working for Friends of the Earth) a PhD from Cambridge in 1988 for a thesis on 'Conservation and colonial expansion: a study of the evolution of environmental attitudes and conservation policies on St Helena, Mauritius and in India, 1660–1860'. By this time he had already edited a collection of essays with David Anderson on *Conservation*

Printed from Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Under the terms of the licence agreement, an individual user may print out a single article for personal use (for details see Privacy Policy and Legal Notice).

Subscriber: University of Cambridge; date: 30 January 2025

in Africa (1987). He subsequently wrote on a global scale in two influential books, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600–1860* (1995) and *Ecology, Climate and Empire: Colonialism and Global Environmental History, 1400–1940* (1997). In these he traced the environmental impact of imperialism, but also the ways in which the colonial experience—which in some cases led to extreme environmental degradation but in others provided 'laboratories' for conservation and reforestation—contributed to the growth of environmentalism and environmental knowledge in the West. As his friend and colleague Rohan D'Souza noted, 'this reappraisal proved significant because it could help him argue and make a strong case for restoring agency and voice in environmental history narratives to local historians, vernacular records and regional perspectives'; indeed his perspective reversed 'the standard model for explaining the transmission of scientific and environmental ideas from Europe to the colonies', with the colonies 'becoming instead important sites for the production of new and innovative ideas' (D'Souza, 223).

Richard Grove held a succession of research and teaching posts at Cambridge, Yale, and the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, DC, before in 2002 becoming a professorial fellow and co-founder—with his wife Vinita Damodaran, whom he met as a fellow PhD student at Cambridge; they married in Pondicherry in 1993 and had one son, Edwin—of the Centre for World Environmental History at the University of Sussex. In 2006 he began a five-year fellowship at the Australian National University in Canberra. By this time he had embarked on a series of historical studies of El Nino—including an edited book with John Chappell, *El Nino: History and Crisis* (2000)—hoping that historical research would inform modern environmental understanding. In 2006, however, he suffered catastrophic injuries in a car accident in Cooma, Australia, which left him severely disabled, and necessitated many years in hospital and rehabilitation. He was eventually able to return to Lewes, East Sussex, where he was looked after by his wife and son. He died at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton, on 25 June 2020, of an aortic dissection.

Sources

The Independent (12 March 2001)

'Jean Grove, 1927–2001', www.giqr.group.cam.ac.uk/about/history/others/Grove.html *<http://www.giqr.group.cam.ac.uk/about/history/others/Grove.html>*, 31 March 2004

personal knowledge (2005)

private information (2005)

b. cert.

m. cert.

d. cert.

Indian Express (1 July 2020) [R. Grove]

Printed from Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Under the terms of the licence agreement, an individual user may print out a single article for personal use (for details see Privacy Policy and Legal Notice).

Subscriber: University of Cambridge; date: 30 January 2025

Mail and Guardian [South Africa] (7 July 2020) [R. Grove]

The Guardian (22 July 2020) [R. Grove]

THES (6 Aug 2020) [R. Grove]

The Times (8 Aug 2020) [R. Grove]

R. D'Souza, 'Richard Grove (1955–2020) and the quest for interdisciplinary environmentalism', *South Asian Studies*, 36/2 (Aug 2020), 222–4 [R. Grove]

J. M. Mackenzie, *Environment and History*, 26/4 (Nov 2020), 458–60 [R. Grove]

J. R. McNeill, 'In memoriam: Richard Hugh Grove, 1955–2020', *Environmental History*, 26 (2021), 3–6 [R. Grove]

b. cert. [R. Grove]

d. cert. [R. Grove]

Likenesses

photograph, repro. in *The Independent*

obituary photographs [R. Grove]

Printed from Oxford Dictionary of National Biography. Under the terms of the licence agreement, an individual user may print out a single article for personal use (for details see Privacy Policy and Legal Notice).

Subscriber: University of Cambridge; date: 30 January 2025